

## Freedom from the World

We are lucky to have Dr. Carter on our panel this morning,” said the moderator, Dr. Harold Stewart as he turned to him. “He comes to us from Ellisville Bible College, where he specializes in Old Testament prophecy and has written such books as *Jesus of the Old Testament*, *Ancient of Days*, *Abram Before the Wilderness*, and others including those involving eschatology.”

The subject of the panel discussion was “Is This the End of Our World as We Know It?” The panel consisted of two politicians, one political science professor, one sociology professor, one social media strategist, one working member of the media, one clergyman, and Dr. Carter. The discussion was part of the Millville University Political Science Department’s “A Look at Our World.”

During the Q&A, the conversation shifted when a participant asked Dr. Carter about one of his books on eschatology.

Dr. Greyson was a psychology professor. She was interested in the “celestial and angelical realm of the Bible.”

“Thank you for that question, Dr. Greyson,” said Dr. Stewart. “Dr. Carter, is it not true that you are an expert in the study of angels or angelic beings? If so, please tell us. We are all ears!”

Dr. Carter cleared his voice, “I’m sorry, that is not case,” he smiled. “I have given my life to studying and practicing the Bible, so that I may best live out its saving message—following Jesus, not angels.”

**1.** *When was a time in your life that you felt restrained by religious rituals?*

**2.** *Have you ever been dismissed or felt unwelcome in a church body because of a false doctrine they were following? What happened?*

**3.** *What does the term “religious freedom” mean to you?*

## False Judgements

*Colossians 2:16-19, KJV*

16 Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days:

17 Which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ.

18 Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

19 And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

*Colossians 2:16-19, NIV*

<sup>16</sup>Therefore do not let anyone judge you by what you eat or drink, or with regard to a religious festival, a New Moon celebration or a Sabbath day.

<sup>17</sup>These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ. <sup>18</sup>Do not let anyone who delights in false humility and the worship of angels disqualify you. Such a person also goes into great detail about what they have seen; they are puffed up with idle notions by their unspiritual mind. <sup>19</sup>They have lost connection with the head, from whom the whole body, supported and held together by its ligaments and sinews, grows as God causes it to grow.

Colossians 2:16-19 builds upon doctrine that Paul laid in earlier verses about the believers' union with Christ. Having been made alive with Christ and forgiven of all your sins—which God nailed to the Cross—therefore, let no one judge you. Do not hear Paul in the tone of the last person who you heard say, "Don't judge me." The apostle's command in verse 16 about letting no one judge you is clarified by a parallel imperative in verse 18 to let no one "disqualify" you. His concern is that the faith of true saints could be shaken for stupid reasons—after God Himself had qualified them (Col. 1:12).

Saints were at risk of being judged as pagans in Colossae for (at least) seven reasons: by how they ate,

drank, adhered to religious festivals, New Moon celebrations, and Sabbath days, and practiced false humility and angel worship. This ethical hodgepodge likely comes from a syncretism of Jewish law (vs. 16) and local culture (vs. 18).

In the old covenant, God required His people to follow Sabbath and dietary restrictions, appointed feasts, and new-moon-corresponding sacrifices (Exod. 20:10, Lev. 11:2, 23:2; Num. 28:11). Jews who rejected Jesus as the Messiah, or those who “received” Him but couldn’t see how He fulfilled the old covenant, persecuted Christians for not obeying the Jewish law. The New Testament is full of mentions of people trying to figure out what to do with the old covenant after Christ’s ascension (Rom. 1–15, 1 Cor. 8-10, Galatians). Paul taught what God intended the old covenant to be in verse 17: “a shadow.”

As shadows make known the existence of shadow-casting objects, the law pointed to things to come—to the substance who is Christ. Paul judged the judgmental in Colossae for forsaking Christ. They are not in Him. If they were, they would cling to Him alone as their Head and receive nourishment through fellowship with His Body. (Paul calls Christ “the head of the body, the church” in Col. 1:18.) These judgmental folks may have spent time with the saints, having “connection with the head” to lose. Yet they remain malnourished, for it is only those united to Christ and, consequently, to His Church who experience God-given spiritual growth. The only thing that grows in the judgmental are their “puffed-up” heads (vs. 18). They would rather disqualify others from peace with God than take heed of their own dead souls.

**4.** *What did Paul command his readers to do?*

**5.** *How could the Colossians identify the false judges who Paul warned about?*

**6.** *What did Paul think about the Colossians accusers’ relation to Christ?*

## Dead with Christ

*Colossians 2:20-23, KJV*

20 Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances,

21 (Touch not; taste not; handle not;

22 Which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

23 Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body: not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

*Colossians 2:20-23, NIV*

<sup>20</sup>Since you died with Christ to the elemental spiritual forces of this world, why, as though you still belonged to the world, do you submit to its rules:

<sup>21</sup>“Do not handle! Do not taste!

Do not touch!”? <sup>22</sup>These rules, which have to do with things that are all destined to perish with use, are based on merely human commands and teachings.

<sup>23</sup>Such regulations indeed have an appearance of wisdom, with their self-imposed worship, their false humility and their harsh treatment of the body, but they lack any value in restraining sensual indulgence.

Paul reasoned with the Colossians, reminding them of their union with Christ in His death. By faith in Christ, the Spirit applies all that Christ accomplished on the Cross to them. His death to the elemental spiritual forces of the world is their death. His disarming of the powers and authorities is their triumph (Col. 2:14).

When you read “elemental spiritual forces of this world” (Col. 2:8, 20), think about the forces in a more familiar passage, Ephesians 2:2: “following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience.” The Colossian saints were no longer under the devil’s rule. Having died with Christ, God had rescued them out of the world and brought them “into the kingdom of the Son he loves” (Col. 1:13). Therefore, it made no sense to allow themselves to be enslaved to regulations they had been set

free from. What God has canceled, let not man reactivate (Col. 2:14). Live out the reality of your union with Christ, Paul said.

The Colossian Christians were pressured to turn their faith in an invisible God into an abstinence from physical objects. Not committing unspecified actions with their hands and tongue would become, at least in part, what faithfulness looks like. Paul noted that everything on their man-made list of “do nots” perishes as they’re used—in contrast to the imperishable things above he would call them to set their minds on in chapter 3.

Deciding not to do things that God has not prohibited is fine. Demanding others not do things that God has not prohibited is deadly. They looked wise to eyes not informed by Scripture. The more things you stop yourself from doing, the more disciplined you look. What strength! But self-reliance, Paul said, stands weak against true temptation from the flesh. Sin laughs in the face of extra laws. It is only by faith in the freedom that Christ purchased saints in His death, and that His Spirit applies to them, that they may successfully kill sin.

Certainly, there are things we should not touch, handle, or taste because the Lord wants us to have clean, healthy bodies and to stay away from sin, but it is wrong for us to elevate ourselves and say to someone, “If you’re doing certain things, you’re a second-class Christian.” We’re all a work in progress. We’re all trying to grow in Christ. Who we must hold on to is Jesus, the only source of life in the entire universe.

**7.** *What aspect of the believers’ union with Christ did Paul apply to his readers in these verses?*

**8.** *What regulations might Paul’s readers have been tempted to submit to?*

**9.** *What did Paul teach that regulations are incapable of achieving?*

## Fleeing from False Doctrine

When I moved away to college, it was the first time that I went “church shopping” without my family. Suddenly, it was up to me to find a church that I felt aligned with the Bible, I was comfortable attending, and appealed to me personally. I had never been in that position before! It was a step forward in making my faith my own, instead of a faith of proximity to Christians in my family.

So my friends and I attended a few different churches to get a feel for what we liked. Over here, the preaching was too dry. Over there, the music was boring and out-dated. Another church was too loud and charismatic for my tastes. Were any of these things inherently wrong? Of course not! It was about my personal preferences.

However, this was not the case with one church. During the sermon that day, the pastor taught that if you were sick, it’s because you weren’t praying enough. You lost your job? You weren’t praying enough. Having relationship difficulties? You weren’t praying enough. I was utterly floored by his teaching—and that the congregation accepted it as truth! We did not go back to that church.

I don’t know that pastor’s heart or history. But it would appear that he was trying to make himself look better by insisting that if you’re having problems, it’s because your faith isn’t strong enough. According to Paul, this kind of false humility is exactly what we should be fleeing from.

**10.** *What is a false doctrine you’ve believed in and need freedom from? If none, do you know someone who is currently living under that captivity who you could share the truth with?*

**11.** *When is a time in your life that you’ve experienced true freedom? How did it feel?*

**12.** *What current situation do you need to be set free from? What are some steps you could take to achieve that goal?*

## Deception in Today's World

There's an ongoing battle for our souls, and one of the biggest weapons in the enemy's arsenal is deception. We can combat this with the truth of God's Word. False doctrines, teachings, and humility will not lead us to happiness or fulfillment, despite their promises. Truth can only be found in Jesus.

► *What traps of deception have you seen? Who do you know who is in such a trap? How can you guard against them yourself and help others?*

### KEY VERSE

As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him: rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

—Colossians 2:6-7, KJV

So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live your lives in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness.

—Colossians 2:6-7, NIV

### DAILY BIBLE READINGS FOR NEXT WEEK'S LESSON

Week of November 20 through November 26

(See *The Quiet Hour and Cross devotionals on these passages.*)

**Mon.** Joshua 24:1-14—Remember God's Goodness.

**Tue.** Joshua 24:15-24—Choose Whom You Will Serve.

**Wed.** Acts 5:27-32—Obey God Only.

**Thu.** James 1:19-27—The Perfect Law of Liberty.

**Fri.** Psalm 119:41-56—Love and Delight in God's Commands.

**Sat.** 1 Corinthians 8—Do Not Cause your Neighbor to Fall.

**Sun.** 1 Corinthians 10:23—11:1—Be Free, but Remember Others.